

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 6471

USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINR, PINT, NL
SUBJ: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: DURK VAN DER MEI-STATE SECRETARY
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. DURK FREDERIK VAN DER MEI IS THE STATE SECRETARY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT OF THE NETHERLANDS. HE WAS BORN ON OCTOBER 13, 1924 IN BRUMMEN AND STUDIED TOWARD A DOCTORATE IN ECONOMICS AT THE MUNICIPAL UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM, RECEIVING HIS MASTERS DEGREE. HE SAW MILITARY SERVICE FROM 1945-49 IN INDONESIA. FOLLOWING THIS HE WORKED AS A STUDENT ASSISTANT AT THE MUNICIPAL UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM AND ALSO DID RESEARCH IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS FOR THE PROTESTANT NATIONAL TRADE UNION, CNV. HE IS CHAIRMAN OF THE NETHERLANDS PROTESTANT SAILORS UNION.

2. VAN DER MEI WAS ELECTED TO THE SECOND CHAMBER OF PARLIAMENT IN 1956 FOR THECHU (NOW MERGED IN THE CENTRIST CDA), AND HAS SERVED IN PARLIAMENT EVER SINCE. AT THE TIME OF HIS ELECTION HE WAS THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF PARLIAMNT. HE WAS CHAIRMAN OF THE SECOND CHAMBER OF COMMITTEE FOR TRADE POLICY
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 THE HA 06471 291141Z

AND IS THE FINANCIAL EXPERT FOC THE CHU GROUP. VAN DER MEI IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, WAS A MEMBER OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE OF THE EEC, AND IS A MEMBER OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE. IN NONE WAS HIS RECORD STRIKING. HE APPARANTLY HAS ALWAYS BEEN OVERSHADOWED BY HIS COLLEAGUES.

3. VAN DER MEI IS MARRIED AND HAS THREE CHILDREN-- TWO GIRLS AND A BOY. HE COLLECTS ANTIQUES AND READS DETECTIVE NOVELS FOR RELAXATION. END UNCLASSIFIED.

4. BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL. VAN DER MEI ASSUMES ONE OF THE TOUGHEST OFFICES AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF SHARP CRITICISM FROM THE PRESS AND DISTINCT MISGIVINGS IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. HIS CRITICS VOICE A WELL-FOUNDED SUSPICION THAT HE WAS CHOSEN AS STATE SECRETARY SIMPLY BECAUSE OF HIS SENIORITY IN THE CHU. WE HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT NEITHER PRIME MINISTER VAN AGT NOR FOREIGN MINISTER VAN DER KLAUW ARE PLEASED BY THE CDA CHOICE. VAN DER MEI BRINGS TO HIS NEW JOB LESS THAN TWO YEARS EXPERIENCE AS A MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT--SCANT BACKGROUND FOR A STATE SECRETARY WHO MUST BE HEAVILY CONCERNED WITH EC AFFAIRS AND TO WHOM THE CABINET USUALLY TURNS FOR ADVICE IN THAT AREA. THE PRESS CHARACTERIZATION OF HIS SELECTION AS A "RISKY DECISION" SEEMS CLOSE TO THE MARK.

5. WHILE SOME OF THOSE WHO HAVE WORKED WITH HIM IN PARTY POLITICS AND THE SECOND CHAMBER TEND TO BE CRITICAL OF VAN DER MEI AND CHARACTERIZE HIM AS BORING AND LACKING IN CREATIVITY, OTHERS TAKE A MORE FAVORABLE VIEW, EMPHASIZING HIS SOUNDNESS, QUIET DETERMINATION AND THOROUGHNESS. CLEARLY, VAN DER MEI IS NOT ONE OF THE "BOYS". HE IS MORE COMFORTABLE WORKING THROUGH BRIEFING PAPERS THAN TALKING TO THE PRESS. AS A PARLIAMENTARY MEMBER OF DUTCH DELEGATIONS, HE GAINED THE REPUTATION FOR TURNING

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 THE HA 06471 291141Z

IN AFTER DINNER RATHER THAN JOINING HIS COLLEAGUES FOR ANOTHER DRINK. HE IS SAID, HOWEVER, TO BE CAPABLE OF A GOOD--EVEN BROAD--UNDERSTANDING OF THE FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES AND HE IS KNOWN TO HAVE ARGUED HIS VIEWS WITHIN THE CDA PARLIAMENTARY PARTY IN AN EFFECTIVE THROUGH LENGTHY AND AT TIMES EVEN TENACIOUS MANNER. HIS ENGLISH IS SAID TO BE FAIRLY GOOD.

6. WE ARE NOT TOO OPTIMISTIC ABOUT PROSPECTS IN THE MFA UNDER THE NEW LINE-UP. STRONG PROFESSIONALS LIKE RUTTEN, ITALIANER AND DE HOOP SCHEFFERS REMAIN ON HAND TO EASE THE TRANSITION, BUT FORMER STATE SECRETARIES KOOIJMANS AND BRINKHORST WILL BE SORELY MISSED. FOREIGN MINISTER VAN DER KLAUW IS HIMSELF A NOVICE IN MANY ASPECTS OF FOREIGN POLICY, INCLUDING THE COMMUNITY. WITH A TOTALLY UNTRIED AND INEXPERIENCED STATE SECRETARY, AND ONLY ONE TO REPLACE TWO SOLID, FIRST-CLASS PERFORMERS, THERE MAY BE SOME DETERIORATION IN THE QUALITY OF DUTCH PERFORMANCE INTERNATIONALLY. A FURTHER QUESTION IS WHETHER THE NEW STATE SECRETARY HAS THE STRENGTH AND CAPABILITY TO ENSURE THAT THE MFA REMAIN THE COORDINATOR OF DUTCH POLICY IN THE COMMUNITY GIVEN THE STRONG INTERESTS OF OTHER KEY MINISTRIES IN HAVING THEIR POSITION ACCURATELY AND VIGOROUSLY DEFENDED IN BRUSSELS.

PERHAPS THE NEW TEAM WILL SURPRISE US, BUT AS OF NOW ITS
APPARENT WEAKNESS SUGGESTS WE MAY BE IN FOR A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY
AND ADJUSTMENT. END CONFIDENTIAL.
MCCLOSKEY

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